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WINNING THE CUSTOMERS REVOLUTION"
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THE CIVIL SERVICE AND ITS MOMENTS OF TRUTH Invariably, the moments of truth in any Civil Service are multitudinous and multifarious. Given the vast array of services rendered by the Civil Service to an equally diverse set of constituents, the pace of the moments of truth is fast and relentless. Each and every encounter the civil servant has with a customer is indeed a moment of truth.

Serving a citizen in processing his or her travel documents, discussing policies and programmes with an elected representative of government, providing technical advisory service to a farmer or fisherman, or providing information to a potential foreign investor represent moments of truth for the Civil Service. Each occasion is a moment of truth simply because it is a crucial point of evaluation for the customer as to the *raison d'être* of the Civil Service as an institution. The impressions formed at these crucial moments, and many many others throughout the length and breadth of nation, each and everyday, contribute to the sum total image of the efficiency, effectiveness and the relevance of the Civil Service. Herein lies the problem. How can one ensure that the service provided by a plethora of agencies at all levels of interaction is of consistent quality? Importantly, how can one ensure that each and every encounter is turned into a moment of value for the customer? Most certainly, the acid-test of each moment of truth is whether the service provided was of value to the customer in that it met the needs of the customer at that point in time. The favourable or unfavourable image of the entire Civil Service thus rests on the aggregation of these critical moments. The crux of the problem thus is ensuring consistency in the quality of each and every moment of truth.

THE QUALITY MINDSET Permit me to elucidate what we in the Malaysian Civil Service have done to handle this problem. We have adopted several strategies to bring about a fundamental reorientation in the mindset of civil servants.

The underlying goal is to institutionalise a quality ethos in the Civil Service - an ethos premised on the values of timeliness, discipline, accountability, and most certainly responsiveness to the customers we serve. The ultimate objective is to enable the Civil Service to be market-driven and to institutionalise a distinct customer-orientation. An orientation that would result in treating each individual who needs our services as a VIP or Very Important Person. To do this of course every single civil servant has to think and act quality, at all times.

Achieving this state of mind is no easy task. Several factors need to be considered.

Firstly, it requires civil servants to reorientate the traditional-bureaucratic means of operations where services are produced based more in a resource-input mode. This is especially so in budget driven environment in which most Civil Service agencies operate. The shift from an input to an output and outcome orientation requires a major psychological transformation. That Civil Service organisations and ipso facto civil servants would be evaluated on what they produce, and not only on how well they manage resources, is the governing criterion.

Secondly, whilst the quantity of goods and services produced is important, the quality of service provided is indeed paramount. In a customer-driven era, civil servants need to constantly and consistently strive to truly understand the needs of their various customers, and consequently formulate strategies, programmes and activities to produce the required services. Meeting the customers requirements and in fact constantly adding value to the service provided has become critical. Thirdly, the consistency in service quality has not only to be maintained, but continuously improved to keep pace with the changing needs of customers. The objective is to produce services and goods that not only meet, but far exceed, the value-expectations of our customers.

TRANSFORMING THE CIVIL SERVICE Traditional management wisdom dictates that all work must be

broken down into its basic tasks and assigned to an individual or group of specialists. This principle of division of labour and specialisation has served both governments and corporations well for the past 200 years.

However, today where quality, service, speed and cost are the primary measures of performance, this principle is increasingly becoming a hindrance. To create value for the customer, the focus of management has to shift from tasks to the processes involved in delivering the final product or service to the customer. This ultimately determines the success or failure of any organisation.

To be process-oriented, management needs to rethink the way things are currently organised.

Firstly, the structure of organisations has to change.

Departments and divisions have to change from functional units to process teams, resulting in flatter less hierarchical organisations. Secondly, workers will have to be given greater autonomy to make decisions on the spot, without having to refer up the hierarchical chain. Employees need to be empowered to take charge of the performance expected of them.

Thirdly, management has to become less command and control-oriented, that is, managers have to change from supervisors to coaches. Management's role has to be one of facilitating processes, supporting process teams and giving less orders. One implication of this of course is, much of middle management's function as a conduit for information and instructions would become increasingly unnecessary.

We are aware of these imperatives and have taken measures to realign the Civil Service accordingly.

The Malaysian Civil Service has consciously adopted Total Quality Management (TQM) as a strategy to achieve the desired transformation. TQM is used as an approach to mobilise all available resources in the organisation to meet customer requirements. Several specific programmes, such as the Quality Process, the Quality Inspection and the Quality Feedback Systems, have been introduced and implemented in organisations Civil Service-wide, premised on the TQM philosophy. In this regard we have paid particular attention to the management of counter services in agencies, cognisant of the fact that the image of the Government often times is dependent of the quality of service provided at the front-line. We have also introduced the Client's Charter which is a written commitment by all agencies pertaining to the delivery of quality goods and services that comply to their respective customers requirements.

In order to stimulate and energise civil servants to think and act quality at all times, a system of recognition and reward has also been set in place. This is to ensure that, not only the quality message permeates throughout the Civil Service, but importantly the values of a quality mindset are inculcated. The internalisation of these values we believe would go a long way in ensuring that each and every moment of truth would result in truly satisfying the needs of the individual customer. The multiplier-effect of such successful moments of truth, we believe, can only but have a salubrious consequences for the image of the Civil Service.

Of course our march towards achieving the requisite mindset is not without problems. Whilst Mr. Carlzon had to reorientate the thinking of 20,000 or so personnel at SAS, from a product to a customer-focus, the Malaysian Civil Service has about 700,000 personnel to contend with.

Bringing about a mental transformation with the kind of numbers involved over a plethora of agencies spread across the nation, is indeed a monumental task. Suffice to say we have embarked on this journey fully aware of the challenges. We believe some significant progress has been made towards making civil servants more customer-focussed. However a whole lot more needs to be done in order to achieve the targets of excellence we have set. We are determined to continuously strive to bring about incremental improvements without losing sight of our larger mission. In this we are encouraged by the fact that our customers are beginning to provide positive feedback.

To us, every moment of truth that is positive, represents the essential building block towards achieving a culture of excellence - and "winning the customers revolution".